

# Ongoing Evaluation: The Role of Teachers and Learners

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Evaluation is an effective means of measuring teaching and learning performances in a language program and of improving the teaching process. It can be used to trace both teaching procedures and learning progress. By comparing their teaching to the syllabi and any other documents, teachers can evaluate their teaching and adjust their teaching strategies to meet the learners' needs and the requirements of the program.

Evaluation is a process to judge or measure the value of a finished or ongoing program, plan, or even a policy (Gasper 1995). In the language teaching field, especially in ESL/EFL programs, there are numerous reports on how to apply evaluations to class activities and program assessment (McDonough and McDonough 1990; Marrow and Scholker 1993; Williams and Burnden 1994; Carry and Dauber 1995; Mackay et al., 1995). An approach based on the evaluation theory is proposed by Jack C. Richards and Charles Lockhart (1995). This article will focus on the ongoing evaluation of a language program in China and the roles of the teachers and learners in the process.

## **Evaluating an Ongoing Language Program**

Ongoing evaluation, which occurs during the progression of an action, is a widely used means of judging the progress and achievements of language programs. Developers and supervisors often use the results of their evaluations to rate programs. Evaluations may help directors decide such matters as ranking teachers, funding the programs, and promoting teachers. In some cases, evaluations include input from colleagues and supervisors, with teachers and learners playing only a passive role in the evaluation process.

The ongoing evaluation of language programs can assist in improving teaching and learning practices and help teachers and learners. First, teachers and learners can objectively view their work and performances during the course. Second, they can better understand the course progression and its relation to the program's goals. Third, teachers and learners can benefit from the evaluation by modifying their teaching or learning strategies, thus improving their performances. By participating in the ongoing evaluation program, teacher and learners become more involved in the program. Finally, the evaluation project can help to create good rapport between teachers and learners.

Ongoing evaluation is a systematic and reflective process to measure the program. Unlike other evaluations, this project usually involves only the teacher and learners. It can be considered a self-evaluation process. Administrators or supervisors of the program may provide background information or other materials. They also can be asked to inspect the project at its conclusion.

## Stages in Evaluating

The teacher and learners should perform ongoing evaluations periodically. An initial ongoing evaluation may be carried out in the first week. “The tone here will probably have a greater overall effect on the success of the course than what occurs later, since initial impressions are very often more enduring than later ones” (Hutchinson and Waters 1987).

Formal ongoing program evaluations may be at one month intervals or at each stage of the program as a check on the progress of the courses. Informal evaluations may be carried out whenever the teacher and learners think it is necessary. It is important at all stages that data be stored in a database for analysis. The ongoing evaluation process is divided into four stages. (See Figure 1 below)

### Stage 1

In the preparation period of the program, the teacher will need to have complete program documents including the curriculum, syllabus, and any other related materials. The teaching materials should be evaluated to see that they correspond with the program’s requirements and teaching methodology. The learners’ data, like personal information, language proficiencies, language learning strategies, and other psychological factors, should be collected. From the data collected and studied, the teacher should have a thorough knowledge of the program and the learners. Then a detailed teaching plan can be written.

### Stage 2

After the language program has started, the teacher and learners may use informal evaluations to measure their performances. Both the teacher and learners should be actively involved in collecting data and analyzing them periodically during the course.

Teachers and learners will need to observe each other’s performance. Besides teaching, the teacher should conduct studies on the learners’ styles and their learning strategies. This may include recording students’ responses to the teacher’s questions and the roles learners play in the discussions. The learners will need to observe the teacher’s performances during classroom activities and the teaching techniques used. Both the teacher and learners can share views on their observations and make comments on questionnaires and during periodical interviews and group discussions. Learners should receive feedback from the teacher on corrections and personal conversations with the teacher.

The teacher should become familiar with the learners’ learning styles in order to compare the learners’ classroom behavior to their learning strategies, which were collected during the first stage. Also, the teacher can assist learners in adapting their learning strategies to suit the present program. Conversely, the learners may study the teaching strategy of the teacher and make comments, so adjustments can be made to suit their own needs and the goals of the program.

### Stage 3

After a certain period, a formal or periodic evaluation needs to be carried out. During this period, the data previously collected are studied to see if the goals have been achieved. At this point, the teacher and supervisor can study all the data such as scores, comments, and other feedback from

the learners. Periodic discussions may be needed so teacher and learners can exchange views on each other's styles.

Documents such as syllabi, informal evaluation results and materials of other similar programs can be studied and compared to the evaluation results, so as to obtain an objective view of the program's progress. The learners should also write brief summaries of their learning progress during this stage. The teacher can then revise the plan for the coming sessions.

#### **Stage 4**

When the program is concluded, another evaluation should be undertaken. The teacher and the supervisor of the program need to study all the data collected during the course of the program. The result of this stage should be an objective comment and/or statistical conclusion that summarizes the progress of the program. This is later used as the fundamental data for the institutional evaluation and as a reference for similar future programs.

During all the stages, feedback should be readily available to the teacher and learners, so they can understand what adjustments they must make throughout the course.

### **Factors and Data Collection**

Within a language program, there are numerous factors which need to be considered and studied in order to get an objective view of the teaching process (Braskamp et al., 1984). These factors may be classified into four fields and are self-explanatory (See Figure 2 below).

#### **Collecting data**

Ways of collecting data are varied. In our own teaching practice, we used questionnaires and classroom discussions. During the classroom discussions, the teacher sat among the learners with a class monitor chairing the sessions. Both teacher and learners made comments about the classroom activities during a certain period. Frank criticisms and friendly suggestions not only provided direct and objective views on the teaching/learning process, they also created closer relations between the learners and the teacher. Both received immediate feedback from these sessions, allowing them to adjust their strategies.

The feedback on how the teacher teaches and how learners learn could be shared with the supervisor and the learners.

Besides direct communication, we also used questionnaires for some sensitive questions. Figure 3 below is an example of a questionnaire that we adopted from Grammar Practice Activities (Ur 1988).

Learners completed these questionnaires anonymously. After the questionnaires were collected, the teacher statistically rated the value of each question in order to get the learners' opinions on the teaching. The results of the questionnaire showed that the learners wanted the teacher to use the blackboard more often, wanted more opportunities to speak in English, and wanted the teacher's help in their oral and listening practices. All these data helped improve the teaching and as a result, benefited the learners.

In addition to these two methods of collecting data, we found program record-keeping, class observations, and personal interviews effective means of data collection.

All these results should then be entered into a database for study and evaluation. By comparing these data, the teacher is able to monitor the progress of the program, and the learners also know where the program is going.

## **Feedback and Benefits**

Ongoing evaluations should never be a means of punishment for either the teacher or learners. Instead, it should help both parties in their practices. Teachers and learners should have positive attitudes and consider the evaluation process as part of the program. Teachers may not only pay attention to fulfilling the text objectives, but they may also learn about the students' learning styles and strategies. On the other hand, the learners become aware of how the teacher teaches and why certain methods are used. By mutual observations and the exchange of ideas, both help improve the learning process.

By using the computer in the evaluation process, the teacher and learners get instant feedback, thereby allowing them to adjust the teaching and learning to suit the requirements of the program. The learners can also benefit by learning about other learning strategies. Thus, because teachers become aware of the learners' styles, they are able to adjust their teaching methods to better serve the learners' needs.

## **Conclusion**

An ongoing evaluation is a systematic review of a language program. By changing the roles of teacher and learners in a program, the teaching and learning can improve. The process should include teachers and learners and various kinds of activities at the different stages of evaluating. The evaluation also benefits the teacher who becomes a researcher and makes research a part of the classroom activity. Finally, supervisors of the program can learn more about the program, making it easier for them to make decisions when setting up future programs. Most importantly, an ongoing evaluation benefits everyone involved by helping to maximize communication between the teacher and learners.

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**Figure 1**

<b>Stages in Evaluating</b> <i>The process is divided into four stages with four levels of evaluation</i>				
Stage	Evaluation and doer	Function and Explanation	Data and Document	Result
Preparation	Pre-evaluation: (done by the teacher)	1. Collect basic data 2. analyze syllabus and and textbooks 3. study and plan for the reference materials program	1. learners' basic data 2. program documents 3. teaching materials 4. reference materials from similar programs	teaching plan in detail
Ongoing Program	Informal evaluation (conducted by the teachers and the learners)	1. study procedure 2. compare the goal and achievements 3. analyze strategies of both teaching and learning	1. notes and comments from both teacher and learners 2. exercises and quizzes both teaching and learning 3. interviews and discussions	reports and immediate feedback
	Formal (or	1. measure	1. data of informal	reports and

	periodical) evaluation (done by the teacher and supervisor)	achievements 2. analyze the results and strategies 3. plan for the remainder of the program 4. analyze and compare the data and other reference documents	evaluation with statistical analysis 2. tests and comments 3. teaching notes	teaching plan for next stage
Post-program	Summary (evaluation done by the teacher and supervisor)	1. review program 2. study the process of the program 3. prepare for authoritative evaluation	1. test scores or other results 2. class papers or learners' comments 3. teacher reports, plans and teaching notes 4. analyzed data	summary and report

**Figure 2**

<b>Factor fields</b>	<b>Items</b>
of organization	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. program plan and syllabus</li> <li>2. staff and specific course teaching plan</li> <li>3. evaluation results of prior programs and teaching materials</li> </ol>
of learner	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. basic data such as name, age, sex, etc.</li> <li>2. language tests and other records on the proficiencies</li> <li>3. learning strategies and other psychological factors involved</li> <li>4. attitudes toward the program</li> </ol>
of teaching and learning	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. teaching notes and class activity records</li> <li>2. exercises and comments</li> <li>3. comments on class activities by both teacher and learners</li> </ol>
of the result	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. scores and other achievement records</li> <li>2. summaries and evaluation reports</li> </ol>

Figure 3

1. How much do you feel you have learned in this course so far?

☐ a lot    ☐ quite a lot    ☐ not much    ☐ nothing

2. Do you find the material

☐ too easy?  
☐ too difficult?  
☐ about the right level of difficulty?

3. How do you rate the teaching?

☐ excellent    ☐ good    ☐ all right    ☐ not very good    ☐ bad    ☐ terrible

4. Do you consider the material interesting?

☐ Yes, very    ☐ Yes, quite    ☐ No, not very    ☐ No, it's very boring

5. In general, do you prefer

☐ working on your own?  
☐ working in small groups?  
☐ working in the full class, teacher-directed?

6. Do you want

☐ more listening?  
☐ more talking?  
☐ more reading?

7. Do you think you should have tests

☐ once a week?  
☐ once a month?  
☐ less than once a month?  
☐ never?

8. How do you rate the textbook, *Modern American English*?

☐ excellent    ☐ good    ☐ all right    ☐ not very good    ☐ bad    ☐ terrible

If you have any further comments, please write them below.

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